
The Annual Evaluation

The annual evaluation sums up a year's activity of setting expectations, goals, and measurements; providing regular performance feedback; offering coaching and training when necessary; and gathering information on a year's worth of employee effort. The annual evaluation gives employees an opportunity to share information about how they see their work. It is also an opportunity for both supervisors and employees to look ahead to areas of change, skill development, and competency acquisition.



The Annual Evaluation Process

The annual evaluation begins with the task of gathering information throughout the year on employee performance. Employees value evaluations that are fair, complete, and representative. Employees disregard evaluations that focus too much on personal opinion or do not represent a year's effort. Your objective should be to create evaluations covering performance across the evaluation period and based on reasoned assessments of job duties, goals and measurements.

Gathering Information

Many managers and supervisors are overwhelmed by the “doing” of their jobs. They feel they don't have time to perform their management responsibilities of guiding, leading, mentoring, coaching, and evaluating employees and their performance. Gathering information for annual performance review is simply one more task that is “too much” to do.

How to Gather Information Efficiently

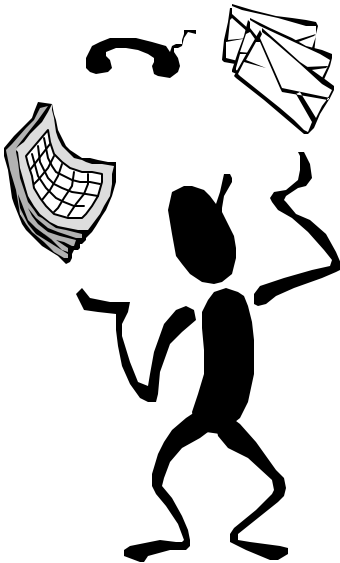
- **Have your employees help you out** – employees can provide regular written documentation about their work. Ask your employees to complete a monthly or quarterly report on their accomplishments, tasks completed, development efforts undertaken or completed, etc. Let them know that this information will become the basis for performance evaluation and compensation.
- **Have occasional meetings** during the year focused on employee performance (at least quarterly). Keep notes. These notes should not be exclusively positive or negative – they should reflect the array of performance.

- **Store information from others** on employee performance. If employees receive commendations, written or verbal, from others, include that in your files.
- **Observe employee performance.** Employees produce work – reports, evaluations, correspondence, conferences, etc. Observe this performance and make notes. If employees make client/customer/constituent calls, go with them to observe performance. If employees are on the phone, set up listen-in times. Conduct occasional random samplings of work to check for accuracy, completeness, timeliness, etc.



- Companies use **outside sources** to receive feedback on employee performance. They use comment sheets, shopper surveys, focus groups, customer surveys, etc., to determine how they're doing.
- **Outside personnel and customers** provide on-going feedback on your performance – what are these people saying about your work group and your staff? You will hear about people who are helpful or unhelpful, efficient or inefficient, knowledgeable or not knowledgeable.
- **Internal reports**, such as call volumes, drop times, and budget data, can tell how productive the department or an individual is.
- Any **disciplinary actions** or discussions related to performance problems.

The information you collect should reflect a year's observations. In this way, you can avoid the following:



- **Excessive leniency:** not giving low ratings because you don't want to antagonize staff.
- **Excessive strictness:** not giving high ratings because no one is capable of consistently exceeding expectations.
- **Central tendency:** rating everyone in the middle, rating everyone as average.
- **Halo effect:** an employee receives a high rating due exclusively to performance in one area, rather than the full array of performance.
- **Pitchfork effect:** all ratings are negative because of a personal dislike for an employee.
- **Recency error:** only evaluating the last month of performance because you haven't kept notes and can't remember what happened throughout the year.

You should do periodic checks during the year on your performance evaluation files. It's important to correct information gaps as they occur rather than try to recollect events or activities many months after the fact.

The Evaluation Meeting and Written Evaluation

The evaluation meeting and written evaluation are the two final activities of the performance evaluation process. These two tasks can be handled in differing order (unless the order is specified by departmental policies), but your goals should be to achieve effective **two-way communication** between you and your staff.

The Meeting

An evaluation meeting can be highly successful or an uncomfortable time for both supervisor and employee. Your goal is to make the evaluation productive, informative, and constructive. Much depends on how you prepare for this activity and follow through on these key components:

Plan for the Meeting

To plan for your part of the meeting, you should have some ideas of how well you think the person is doing against relevant job duties and measurements. You should think about the following areas:

On what strong points can I compliment the employee?

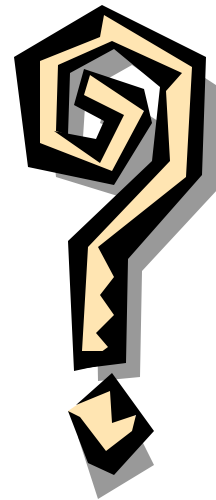
On what areas should I focus discussion for improvement?

Do I have records on hand to support my evaluation?

Do I have a plan that will help the employee improve performance?

Are my suggestions flexible enough to allow for employee input?

After the evaluation, how will I reinforce my suggestions?



The evaluation meeting serves as a form of feedback, which helps employees understand how you view their progress and performance.

Managing the Meeting

To create a constructive experience, you should manage the meeting's progress. The employee will look to you to guide the process.

The opening

- **State the purpose.** You are there to discuss and assess performance over the evaluation period.
- **Same process for everyone.** Note that this is an annual activity for everyone.
- **Your purpose is to improve performance.** You can emphasize that the employee's performance is part of the whole, and your goal is to improve the quality of both.
- **You want to find out how things are going from the employee's perspective.** Since employees may not have many opportunities to share their perspective, it's important to provide time for the employee's view of how it's going.
- **You want to clarify what's going well and where improvements can occur.** Since every organization is in a state of continuous improvement, this is a general process for individuals and the work group.
- **You want to discuss goals and development plans for the future.**

Employee's turn

- **Encourage the employee to appraise his or her own performance.** Do not monopolize the meeting time. The employee can verbalize his/her performance evaluation by referring to the evaluation form or the individual performance plan.
- **Ask some open questions, if you need to, to get things started.**

I'd like to hear how you feel things are going on the job – the progress you've made and any challenges you are facing.

I know you haven't been with us long – but I'd like to know how you feel you've adjusted to the job since you started with us.

How are things going with the changes we've made this year?

What challenges do you feel have made the job interesting – or difficult – for you this year?

What exceptional activities did you get involved in?

Your turn – guiding the discussion productively:

- **Use close-ended questions to elicit specific information.**

Do you plan to take courses in Excel in the fall?

Do you have specific additions to your career development plan?

- **Use follow-up questions to pursue an issue or continue a particular thread.**

Can you explain how these changes helped you in your work?

Did you mean that the training was less helpful than you anticipated?

Tell me more about how you think you could do the job better.

- **Use reflective statements to make sure you've interpreted employee comments accurately.**

Let me make sure I understand...

It sounds like you'd prefer to...

- **Use summarizing questions or statements to recapitulate points that have been made.**

So you feel that your real strengths lie in...

So you feel that if you just got some additional training in...

These questioning skills are critical to achieving two-way communication in the interview process. They will also help you set the foundation for your assessments.

Offering Assessments

Your assessment is a key element of the evaluation. You want to make sure that employees have heard and understood how you evaluate their performance.

- **When offering praise**, you should be specific and relate it to particular job duties or competencies. Overly generalized praise may feel good, but it's not helpful to an employee who wants to know where he/she is doing well and how he/she is meeting your expectations. Specific praise helps employees to reproduce the work that's valued.
- **When offering constructive feedback**, you should be specific and relate it to particular job duties or competencies. *It's important that the employee should not **first** hear of disciplinary performance in the performance evaluation.* Be factual and calm – if the employee is emotional, wait until he/she calms down. You may want to say such things as:
 - I see this is upsetting to you...*
 - I see this is frustrating...*
 - I see this is confusing...*
- **Stay on track**, let the employee offer his/her perspective, reinforce the performance expectation, show confidence that the employee can achieve the necessary performance levels.

The Written Evaluation

The written evaluation is an important document as it becomes the employee's and the organization's permanent record performance over the established review period.



As with the verbal review, the objective of the written evaluation is to share with employees their key strengths, observations about their current performance levels, and areas for improvement. The written evaluation provides opportunities for establishing goals for the future, identifying projects, setting training timelines, etc.

You should understand that you're writing for a varied readership, including the employee, management, human resources, government agencies, and, potentially, grievance arbitrators.

Ratings against Measures

You should develop your rating based on how well the employee has performed in relation to the employee performance plan, previously established measures, and any other relevant activities. You will base your assessment on the collection of factual material and observation.

Making Judgments

Performance evaluation requires that managers make judgments based on employee work performance. These judgments affect how the employee sees his/her own work, motivation levels, compensation, communication levels, etc. It is important that judgments are based on factual evidence and observation, not on opinion. The evaluation process moves from the collection of fact to assessment. Evaluations should not include personal opinions or ill-formed assessments, unimportant quibbles or evaluations of minor or irrelevant activities.

Opinions

In general, opinions are reflected through loaded words:

Always, never, poor attitude, bad work habits, sloppy, not a team player, etc.

Sue has a poor attitude about her work load which affects our overall productivity. She does not get her reports in on time, so we lose all credibility with other departments.

Judgments

Judgment represents a thoughtful consideration of facts, and derives from inferences based on the facts:

Audit reports must be completed within two weeks of departing the college. On three occasions, Sue did not complete her portion of the work within the established timeframe. While the work when completed is thorough and accurate, when we miss deadlines, we undermine our credibility with the college.

Setting Tone and Style

Tone derives from the words you use. Style refers to whether material is formal, informal, conversational, colloquial, etc. The performance evaluation should have a conservative tone (words should not be highly loaded) and a formal-informal style. The performance evaluation is not a chatty document; it's used for grievances or other legal purposes, or as recommendations, and requires a relatively disciplined style.

Poor tone:

Sue must improve her cooperation with others immediately. She never supports others when they ask her for some assistance. She says she is too busy doing her own work. The work load in the department has increased dramatically over the last three months, so everyone has to pitch in. Sue has to get with it so we can continue to meet our goals.

Improved tone:

The department has taken on additional work with the recent reorganization. Since that time, there has been some confusion about work load, with redistribution necessary to maintain our productivity. On three occasions when the department asked everyone to take on more files, Sue resisted. She did not respond to efforts to help her organize her work load more effectively so she could handle more files. When others asked her support on tasks that needed immediate completion, Sue stated that she could not help because "that work was not her job." In the new environment, it is important that Sue continue to work on her productivity by organizing her desk more efficiently to process work, and that she shows flexibility by taking on additional assignments when requested.

Notice that the second version is more developed, more controlled in its word choice, less conversational in its phrasing, and more credible in the presentation.